

Performance Standards Q&A
As of November 23, 2016 – *New Q&As are in red*

Assessment Questions

Q1. If programs hold off on pretesting, how would this affect their performance points?

A. The ACLS assessment policy will not change; programs must still pretest students according to the policy manuals for the assessments being used.

Q2. Would a program that tested all year until April or May be negatively affected in terms of performance points for EFL?

A. No

Q3. Please make the Excel sheet for us to figure out our own program's target % for EFL available to us for this fiscal year.

A. ACLS emailed the Excel tool to the participants who were in the Performance Standards session at the Directors' Meeting. The tool and instructions will be posted to the ACLS website by September, 2016.

Q4. Will the performance goals be set after students are enrolled because student levels shift from year to year?

A. In terms of the EFL performance standard, a program would receive its target percent for the EFL performance standard after all pretesting is completed.

Q5. Massachusetts assess with the MAPT but that is not aligned with the HiSET, so which do we use as our target in designing curriculum?

A. Curricula should be aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRSAE). HiSET is aligned with CCRSAE, and MAPT will be aligned starting FY18.

Q6. Will the policies related to attendance, average attended hours, and pre/post testing still be in place?

A. Yes

Q7. What incentive is there for programs to post test if the pre/post testing process standard is no longer a performance standard?

A. ACLS pre/post test policy remains. In order to formally document student progress, programs must post-test. The EFL Progression measure is dependent on post-testing.

Q8. Has ACLS done a comparison of EFL completions with assessment tools other than the approved assessments? Has OCTAE?

A. No

Q9. Has ACLS run a comparison on how well students make EFLs on the MAPT and the TABE?

A. No. Currently, the MAPT is fully aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. In FY18, the MAPT will be aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRSAE).

Q10. Is the MAPT "harder" than the tests other states use? If EFL completions for ESOL are better than those for ABE, could ABE programs be allowed to use other NRS-approved assessments other than the MAPT?

A. MAPT is more aligned with the CCRSAE than other tests, and therefore, a better tool for assessing whether a student is college and career ready. Massachusetts is not looking to use another assessment other than the MAPT.

Q11. Could ACLS check in with more than just a couple of states on what they have in place for EFL and for their other performance standards?

A. Yes

Q12. Is the formula for calculating program targets based on all students or only students who were pre- and post-tested?

A. For the EFL performance standard, the target will be based on all students who are pretested and have 12 hours of attendance.

Q13. Will points be awarded for EFL within a one-year timeframe or might ACLS look at EFL over multiple years?

A. Points for EFL will be awarded in a one-year time frame.

Q14. How does the focus on EFL completion/progression effect enrollment? Why not look at student growth for the time period when students were in the program, not within one fiscal year?

A. OCTAE requires that states report EFL completion rates within the fiscal year.

Q15. Could you give an example of the formula for calculating EFL program target with numbers and a legend?

A. ACLS will address this in a training.

Q16. Will our state get sanctioned if our EFL numbers remain low (lower than the targets set by OCTAE)?

A. EFL completion factors into overall state performance. Overall, poor state performance could result in sanctions.

Q17. Will there be trainings this summer on EFL and the other new standards?

A. There will be webinars providing information on the new performance accountability system, which includes information on the EFL standard.

Q18. Will SABES offer training on EFLs?

A. We will work with SABES on assessing the needs of the field around EFLs.

Q19. Could programs have a choice as to whether they use the MAPT? Could another standardized assessment be used for ABE students?

A. Programs must use the MAPT if they have ABE students/classes. The only exception is made with the ABECL programs since some of the jails and prisons do not have Internet access for inmates.

Q20. What does MSG stand for?

A. Measurable Skill Gain

Q21. What is the rationale for “ditching” meaningful gain for the arbitrary NRS lines/thresholds?

A. EFL is used throughout the country and is one of the federal measures for ABE. Also, ACLS is still working on the new accountability framework; a final decision has not been made on what this will look like.

Q22. Will programs pre- and post-test students as usual?

A. Yes. The assessment policies will not change.

Q23. What about students who progress w/in EFL but not reaching the next level? 103-189

A. Our Educational Functioning Level (EFL) Progression measure is set up to recognize whether students progress from one grade level equivalency (GLE) range to another or from one student performance level (SPL) to another. ACLS acknowledges that some students show they benefited from their participation as observable by score gains that are sizeable. However, ACLS sees movement from one GLE to another as something that is of intrinsic interest and worth measuring in its own right.

Q24. Could ACLS provide a detailed description and explanation of the EFL standard?

A. Yes. More information can be found [here](#).

Q25. What is the guidance on analyzing EFL data based on the TABE CLAS-E test when a raw score indicates an SPL of X+?

A. ACLS understands the issue with the CLAS E assessments and we will follow up with OCTAE on this question at which point we hope we can give the field more guidance.

Q26. How can one possibly measure a 7-hour week program with the same expectation for EFL progress as a 20-hour week program? Students with more instructional time make faster progress.

A. ACLS acknowledges the almost certain fact that students with more instructional time make faster progress. However, ACLS also requires all programs to provide, at a minimum, ways to show that their students are making progress in a way that can be measured. Therefore, it is important for programs to develop strategies that improve their ability for ensuring that students are making progress in a way that is measurable through the standard. ACLS encourages programs to work with their program specialists, representatives from SABES professional development centers, and other stakeholders to determine whether adjustments related to student retention strategies, instructional services, and program design would place them into a better position to ensure that their students are making progress and that it is measurable.

Q27. When will Table 4 (EFL gain targets) be sent to programs?

A. ACLS sent the tool to ABE program staff who attended the performance standards session at the ABE Directors' Meeting; the tool was sent out in June.

Q28. Why the changes in performance standards points when you have so much to work out? Why not add the EFL completion and others to existing performance points?

A. ACLS and the Performance Measures Task Force recognized the need to closely align the Massachusetts accountability system with WIOA federal measures. The current system was created in 2006; much has changed in terms of what students need to get to their next steps. Also, in the past, programs were not aware of how Massachusetts fared in terms of federal accountability; the new accountability framework is more aligned with the federal accountability system.

Q29. What is the difference between EFL progression and EFL completion?

A. They are synonymous terms.

Q30. How many points will programs receive for EFL compared to the other standards?

A. ACLS has not yet decided on the overall points for EFL or for each of the other performance standards.

Q31. What will be the denominator for the EFL performance standard: all students with 12 hours of attendance or only those students with a pretest?

A. The denominator will be all students with at least 12 hours of attendance and a pretest.

Q32. If some programs – smaller programs -- only tested those students that they think would make gains, then couldn't this cause a program to do better on EFL than a program that's larger and not able to hold back on testing?

A. Each year programs sign the Statement of Assurances that commit to data collection and assessment policies. To ignore these policies could result in loss of funding.

Q33. Can you examine other states' proficiency tests to ensure our tests are similar?

A. Several years ago, Massachusetts examined all NRS-approved assessments and selected those that most closely aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. In FY18, MAPT will be aligned to the CCRSAE. ACLS has always aimed to ensure that its state standardized assessments were aligned to what students needed to know to be successful on their paths to college and career readiness. ACLS could examine other states' tests; however, the goal is not to align with other states, but rather to align to the CCRSAE.

Q34. Are the new EFL level descriptors approved?

A. Not yet. For more information, go to the NRS website.

Q34. How will the cut points for EFL be determined?

A. ACLS has not decided on cut points yet.

Q36. If program percentage is assigned after pretesting, how does this account for managed enrollment where we pretest students multiple times during the year (e.g., last enrollment is in the spring)?

A. EFL percentage will be assigned after all pretesting is complete for the year. The assessment policies will still be in place; therefore, pretests after April 1 will not be included in the denominator.

Q37. How will I know if the gains my students make are enough for my program to be considered well-performing?

A. How well a program performs will be based primarily on its EFL completion rate. Points will be assigned based on the percentage of students that complete an EFL relative to the program's target.

Q38. What cohort do you base program targets on? First group? Second term? Third? Fourth?

A. Program targets for EFL will be based on five years of past data from all programs in the state and the number of students who pre-test into each of the NRS levels that the program has. This is a weighted target; it creates a level-playing field for programs that serve students in what historically have been hard-to-serve NRS EFLs.

Q39. If we post-test an ABE student in both reading and math, how will you determine whether EFL progression has been met?

A. EFL progression will be based on student performance based on their assigned primary assessment area.

Q40. With changes to eligibility that can include those with HS credentials testing 10.9 (they will be high ASE), how will we show gains?

A. The low ASE range is GLE 9.0 to 10.9. The high ASE is GLE 11.0 to 12.9. Any student, except those with a high school equivalency credential, with a primary assessment below GLE 11.0, could complete the low ASE EFL (i.e., show gain).

Q41. Higher level ESOL students are currently assessed using the TABE CLAS-E in our program because we feel it is a better measure (Advanced or Career Pathways). Sometimes they score a SPL 6 at pre-test and it's not possible to make an EFL gain with that test. What to do?

A. A scale score of 612 and above in CLAS-E Writing Level 4 (both Forms A and B) is the exit criteria for students in the Advanced ESL level. Once students attain a score of 612, they need to exit the program at the end of the fiscal year if their primary assessment area is ESOL Writing. The same policy applies for ESOL Reading. A scale score of 588 and above in CLAS-E Reading Level 4 (both Forms A and B) is the exit criteria for students in the Advanced ESL level. Once students attain a score of 588, they may not remain in the program the following fiscal year if their primary assessment area is ESOL Reading.

Q42. A student takes the TABE CLAS E level 2 test, scores to be advanced to level 3 test but does not make the number of gain points due to change in tests. How will this work now?

A. Programs must follow the ACLS policies on retesting when CLAS-E pre-test scores are within certain ranges. If students are scoring too high in the pre-test, they should be re-tested as per the Massachusetts Policy Manual (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/CLAS-EWritingPolicy.pdf>, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/CLAS-EReadingPolicy.pdf>). In the situation of a post-test at a higher level, EFL completion is determined if the student has gained enough points to move into the next NRS level.

Q43. What is the research base that NRS levels are based on?

A. To find out more information on the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education and NRS levels, please visit the NRS website at: <http://www.nrsweb.org/>.

Q44. Other states have been using the TABE 9/10. Has there been a study to compare gains from 9/10 in MA vs. gains from MAPT?

A. No. The MAPT is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and will soon be aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS AE). The TABE is not aligned with either.

Q45. For ESL students, does movement to high school diploma program count?

A. There is no measure that takes into account the transition from ESOL services to ABE services.

Q46. Why is Massachusetts so below other states in EFL completions for ABE?

A. Regardless of how Massachusetts compares to other states, the completion rates for all Massachusetts have not moved over the years. Massachusetts's EFL and learner gains have remained mostly flat over the years.

Q47. How is learner gain different from measurable skill gain?

A. Measureable Skill Gain (MSG) is a WIOA federal measure. For Title II (ABE), EFL completion is how MSG will be met. Learner gain is measured solely by the improvement in test scores between the pre- and post-test (i.e., the first and last

test) and does not take into consideration Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) (i.e., a student crossing into a higher NRS level).

Q48. Has a study been made of the MAPT cut points and their alignment with GLE ranges? Poor alignment is the most probable reason for Massachusetts' low ABE performance in relationship to other states.

A. The MAPT is fully aligned to the National Reporting System (NRS) Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) and was specifically built to measure the content of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Starting FY18, the MAPT will align to the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. No NRS approved assessment, including those used in other states, is specifically aligned to GLE ranges.

The MAPT cut points currently in place were the result of three studies involving ABE teachers and were obtained through the process of standard setting designed to demarcate the points on the MAPT score scale that align to the exact NRS EFL descriptions. The participants in the standard setting meeting used the level descriptions to evaluate items and recommend the cuts between levels on the MAPT scale.

Massachusetts ABE is a standards-based system. Programs must ensure that their curriculum and instruction are aligned to the College and Career Readiness standards in order to increase opportunities for their students to produce measurable outcomes as determined by the MAPT.

Q49. If learning gains do not matter for standards purposes, then what is the risk of students who make a significant learning gain (401-499) mattering little or nothing compared to students who go from 499 to 501 (2 points gain)?

A. There is no risk associated with students who make meaningful learning gains but do not make EFL completion. Adult education (title II of the WIOA legislation) is measured on EFL completion and MA reports on EFL completion based on negotiated EFL targets with OCTAE.

Q50. Will special populations be taken into account in the EFL (and other) standards?

A. ACLS is considering this.

Q51. Where and when will the FY17 EFL score ranges for the different assessments be posted?

A. The learner gain standard is effective in measuring students' progress. Please explain why this cannot be kept as a performance standard together with EFL.

ACLS chose not to create a new performance accountability system with two standards that essentially both measure student academic progress; this caused confusion in the field in the previous accountability system. Therefore, ACLS has decided to create a standard that aligns with the WIOA federal measures (i.e., Measurable Skill Gain, which includes Educational Functioning Level completion).

Program-Design Questions

Q1. How do these standards affect program design policies? Will standards still be based on those who set them as goals? What are the options for tests? What do other states use for ABE/ASE assessments? 70% of our students are from college/career. How will we capture their gains?

A. ACLS will allow for more flexibility in the future around program design. Standards are not based on those programs that set them as goals. Many years ago, ACLS had a goals standard that was set up to give a percent of student goals met based on those that students set; however, that changed many years ago and ACLS separated out goals set from goals met. In the new accountability framework, there will not be a goals standard.

Q2. How will low-intensity programs be affected?

A. ACLS is running data on all types of programs. At this point, there is no clear disincentive for low-intensity programs other than in terms of EFLs; data show that high-intensity programs typically do better in terms of moving students to higher EFLs than low-intensive programs. ACLS will provide more information on this including showing data in the months to come.

Q3. How does the new denominator for high ASE affect programs?

A. ACLS's standard for obtaining a high school equivalency or ADP credential will be based on students who pretest into the Low ASE (GLE 9-10.9) and High ASE (GLE 11-12.9) levels and who have attended services for at least 12 hours during the fiscal year by which they exit and do not have a secondary credential. In the past, OCTAE's Obtain a Secondary Credential NRS Cohort was not a state performance standard but was a federal measure reported each year by ACLS and was based on anyone, regardless of their pretest level, who attempted all five subtests of the high school equivalency exam or who were in an Adult Diploma Program (ADP).

Q4. If a student obtains his/her HiSET during the summer, do programs get credit for that in the next fiscal year or will it go with the last fiscal year that a student attends class?

A. Programs will receive credit during the last fiscal year that a student attends class.

Q5. WIOA changes will be impacting programs in FY17, the last year of our current grant cycle. In the past, major changes to program design have been discouraged within the five year plan. Our program has a large number of Family Literacy classes in this five year plan. Since the nature of family literacy classes seems to be changing dramatically, would ACLS consider allowing us to drop family literacy and use that money to intensify other parts of our programs?

A. This is a program design question that should be asked of your ACLS Program Specialist. Program plan changes should reflect the changing needs of your student population; ACLS does not discourage program plan changes if they are responsive to the needs of a program's population.

Q6. How to weigh number of instructional hours into EFL?

A. Programs should plan their design around the needs of students in their community. The number of instructional hours should be sufficient for students to make progress, make EFL gains, and achieve success in the program and beyond.

Q7. Will there be more flexibility in terms of program design in order for programs to meet these new standards?

A. Yes

General Questions

Q1. What is the total number of points a program could receive each year for past performance?

A. ACLS has not yet decided on the overall points for each of the performance standards.

Q2. What do other states do? Do they have complicated performance point systems?

A. Accountability systems in the United States vary greatly. Some states only give past performance points for EFL; others give points for employment measures. Some states tie funding levels to performance.

Q3. Will programs need to do follow up on students who provide a social security number?

A. For the enter postsecondary education (PSE) cohort follow up, ACLS only has the ability to data match for higher education enrollment; data matching doesn't capture enrollment in training programs. The only way to show that outcome is through follow up. In addition, the National Student Clearinghouse, through which ACLS data matches student PSE outcomes, does not use social security numbers for data matching; they use student name, date of birth, and other personal information.

For employment cohorts, students that provide a social security number will be data matched through the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) starting in FY17. Self-employed students do not show up through data matching; therefore, follow up is required to capture that outcome.

Q4. How will programs follow up on students who do not provide a social security number?

A. When a social security number is not provided and/or a release of information form is not signed by a student, follow up must be conducted through email, phone, or another form of contact.

Q5. Is the ACLS performance standards framework final or could the field still weigh in on it?

A. It is not final; ACLS will share its final draft framework with the adult education field for their input and comments. The performance accountability system will be piloted in FY17, and anything that is discovered (e.g., issues, problems) will inform the system, and ACLS will adjust the standards as needed.

Q6. When will the new performance accountability system be completed and will the field have time to get trained on it?

A. ACLS will offer webinars on the new performance accountability system. ACLS is working on creating and testing the remaining performance standards.

Q7. If none of my students provide a social security number, then how will I get points for the employment measures?

A. In Massachusetts, we do not require that students give social security numbers upon enrollment in an ABE program; therefore, if a student does not provide a social security number, the program will need to do follow up after that student exits the program.

Q8. Will SAM be set up so that programs can still enter data on attendance, average attended hours, and pre/post testing?

A. See the latest update on SAM. ACLS will continue to use SMARTT in FY17.

Q9. Will low-level learners be required to get a job upon exiting a program?

A. For the employment standards, the expectations are the same for all students. The employment standards capture whether a student is employed in the second and/or fourth quarter after exit. Programs should work with students to get them the education and next steps that they need that will lead to a family- or self-sustaining wage.

Q10. Will ACLS award a different set of points for high-intensive programs vs. low-intensive programs?

A. No. Many programs have a mix of high and low intensity. Very few programs are either all low or high intensity.

Q11. How do you set performance targets if we bring in three cohorts over the course of the year?

A. Based on the proposed performance accountability framework, targets will be set once all pretesting is completed.

Q12. How to determine rate of earned secondary diploma?

A. Students without a secondary credential or equivalent who pretested into High or Low ASE (MAPT \geq 500; TABE 9/10 Reading \geq 567; TABE 9/10 Math \geq 566; TABE 9/10 Language \geq 560) during the fiscal year, had attendance for at least 12 hours for the year and exited during the year will be counted for the denominator of the rate. The numerator of the rate will be the number of students who were included into the count for the denominator who also received their High School Equivalency or Adult Diploma Program (ADP) during participation or within six months following the end of the fiscal year (i.e., by December 31st).

Q13. Is there a wage level or number of work hours required to count as employment?

A. Students who earned any wages during the quarter of reference (second quarter following the quarter of exit, or fourth quarter following the quarter of exit for our employment and median earnings measures) will count.

Q14. How does this take into account students who start in a program with jobs?

A. The employment standards measure whether a student has a job in the second and fourth quarters after exit. Whether a student enters the program with or without a job does not factor into this standard.

Q15. Will the performance standards be the same for Corrections? Will Corrections be required to do follow up in the same way?

A. The performance accountability system will be adjusted for Corrections as appropriate based on input from the ABECI Programs and based on final regulations from OCTAE.

Q16. Will these measures go into effect for FY17? How will the outcomes affect the open and competitive RFP?

A. FY17 will be a pilot year with the standards on the state level. Massachusetts will be held accountable to OCTAE (federal) in FY17.

Q17. Considering EL Civics, is there any thought to setting citizenship as a performance standard?

A. ACLS recognizes that civics education is taught in many ESOL classes; however, not all students in those classes are studying for citizenship. Moreover, ACLS is striving to align its performance accountability system with the WIOA federal measures.

Q18. Do programs get credit for student drop outs for employment?

A. If a student is employed during the second quarter after exiting the program and then again in the fourth quarter after exit, then the outcome will be met for that student whether or not he/she dropped out or stopped out of the program.

Q19. What about a scenario where an ESOL student exits a program, enters a Bridge to College program, then enters college for two years? Does that student count as a negative outcome? Such a student would have no employment outcome, but of course would be considered a great success by the ESOL program.

A. A student in this scenario would get credit for the postsecondary education enrollment in the state performance standards. Also, students could show EFL completion that would contribute to successful outcomes. ACLS's accountability system will not have disincentives to education attainment.

Q20. Please define by calendar all quarters. What if a person is accounted for in the second quarter employment rate but loses the job before retaining to the fourth quarter? How is performance measured then?

A. Four time periods comprise the quarters that together form the calendar year: January – March, April – June, July – September, and October – December. If a person earned wages during the second quarter following their exit quarter, programs will receive credit for the Second Quarter Employment Rate measure. If a person earned wages during the fourth quarter following their exit quarter, programs will receive credit for the Fourth Quarter Employment Rate measure. No credit is earned in cases where the person did not have any earned wages during the reference quarter.

Q21. Will there be any excluded populations from performance measures (e.g., undocumented, fewer than six years of education in NLL)?

A. No. ACLS will revisit this decision after the pilot year (FY17). Reporting will be aligned to federal reporting requirements.

Q22. What if programs don't achieve the cut points?

A. If programs do not meet the standards, then they will receive fewer or no performance points. The cut points are the amount of points given to each percent range in a given standard.

Q23. Does ACLS feel that target goals should be weighted from full-time programs to part-time programs?

A. No. The data show that program data and performance varies among all types of programs.

Q24. What happens to our students when they leave us? It will be nice to have a clear pathway for our students to move out of ABE into jobs and PSE.

A. ABE programs are encouraged to engage in regional career pathway planning with WIOA partners to develop clear pathways for students leaving ABE programs (e.g., postsecondary education, certificate programs, and jobs). ACLS funds Transition to Community College programs and Adult Career Pathways programs both of which are viable next steps for students in addition to services provided by One-Stop-Career-Centers available to ABE students seeking employment.

Q25. What is difference between student goals, student milestones, and student outcomes?

A. "Student goals" is the term that is used in the current performance accountability system to mean an outcome that a student achieves (e.g., get a library card, get a job, get a HiSET, and enroll in postsecondary education). "Student milestones" was the term that the Performance Measures Task Force created in its recommendation to ACLS for a way to capture those outcomes that students achieve that are not included in the WIOA federal measures. ACLS has decided not to include student milestones in its new framework for accountability. "Student outcomes" is a general term that can be synonymous with both goals and milestones.

Q26. How can ESE ensure that the MCAS testing policies that cause lags between completion of class work and judgment of portfolios doesn't keep students from skills training or PSE enrollment?

A. ACLS will continue to work with the K-12 system to align and streamline policies.

Q27. What counts as postsecondary education (e.g., community college, voc/tech training, certificate, transitions)?

A. Yes. All of the examples are considered postsecondary education.

Q28. Can follow up be accomplished using social media?

A. No. Follow up by survey must adhere to the NRS Guidelines.

Q29. Is follow up at the program level reliable?

A. Yes, as long as the program can reach the student and can verify/get the information needed. For more information, see NRS implementation Guidelines.

Q30. Are cohorts (i.e., denominators) based on students “program-wide” or students who set a goal?

A. The denominators for the performance standards are students with 12 hours of attendance and a pretest. There are no goals standards in the new performance accountability system.

Q31. Are any of the new proposed performance measures starting in FY17 or in not until the next 5-year cycle (starting FY18)?

A. ACLS will be collecting data on all the new proposed standards starting FY17 without holding programs accountable for performance on any of these measures in FY17 (as it's the Open and Competitive year as well). However, MA will be held accountable on all the WIOA federal measures (slightly different from the state standards that ACLS proposes) starting Jul 1st, 2016.

Q32. Will any of the current performance measures be dropped in FY17?

A. Programs will no longer report on the goal performance standard in FY17, and these are data that ACLS will not collect in FY17. ACLS will continue to collect data on attendance, pre/post percentage, as well as all data on the newly proposed state performance standards.

Q33. Do we still need to do follow-up if the student has a social security number? Won't this happen through data matching?

A. If a student does not sign a release of inform form, the program will need to do follow-up. Social Security Numbers (SSNs) are only used for matching purposes on the employment measures. Postsecondary enrollment outcomes are matched through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), but ACLS still encourages follow up to ensure that all data are counted.

Q34. How will employment info be collected?

A. Follow-up screens will show listings of students who have exited. Data entry staff will be able to select from the listings and be presented the relevant contact information as well as the timeframe for which the student will be asked regarding when they had employment.

Q35. How effective will School Brains be in data tracking? How will it account for uncertainty that is so prevalent in our population for example a student:

-moving

-change of phone numbers/email due to inconsistent bill payment

A. ACLS will be providing guidance to programs encouraging them to initiate discussions with students explaining the importance to remain in contact or to update their contact information with the program for at least one year following their exit. As noted in previous communication to the field, ACLS will continue to use SMARTT in FY17.

Q36. Why is the Fourth Quarter Employment rate a program accountability measure, and not a student accountability measure? A program can fantastically prepare a student who can fantastically fail due to circumstances (that we can't program design for).

A. WIOA seeks to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals. Therefore, Massachusetts seeks to measure whether or not the skills students acquire from your services enhances their ability to obtain and retain employment.

Q37. Against which data do you measure median earnings? Based geographically? Per position? Per employee skill set? Following federal guidelines? State guidelines?

A. OCTAE has just released its final guidance related to the WIOA measures. ACLS hopes to provide more information related to this question over the next couple of months.

Q38. Are earnings and employment self reported? Does there have to be proof of income/employment?

A. Students who provide their social security number and also sign a confidentiality release of information form will not be required to be followed up for the employment measures.

Q39. How will we get credit for students who do not go into employment or post-secondary education? What about undocumented students?

A. All students (except students who pretested into High ASE during the fiscal year) will be measured according to whether they progressed to a higher Educational Functioning Level (EFL). All students at the Low and High ASE level will be measured according to whether they attained a high school equivalency or Adult Diploma Program (ADP) credential within one-year following their exit.

Q40. How do you define “enrolled” when next steps happen well after gaining diploma?

A. Enrollment is any attendance within postsecondary education or training. ACLS acknowledges that for some students, this happens well after the completion of their ABE services. However, the time-period included in the measure (from student’s exit date during the fiscal year through December 31st which falls six months after the close of the fiscal year) is of interest to us as it recognizes outcomes that happen fairly soon after exit which we feel holds its own importance.

Q41. How long after a student graduates (or stops out) does his/her employment gain count?

A. As required by WIOA, ACLS seeks to find out whether students had employment during the second and fourth quarters following the quarter of their exit.

Q42. What about students who need to get their lives in order (transportation, childcare, etc) in order to access post secondary or become gainfully employed? (I mean those who take a year+ to get that done after they attain HiSET?

A. ACLS acknowledges that for some students, this happens well after the completion of their ABE services. However, the time-period included in the measure (from student’s exit date during the fiscal year through December 31st which falls six months after the close of the fiscal year) is of interest to us as it recognizes outcomes that happen fairly soon after exit which we feel holds its own importance.

Q43. Does employment include part time?

A. Yes. Any employment will count.

Q44. Doesn’t data matching have to be improved?

A. Issues with data matching arise when data at a program level are not entered correctly (e.g., misspelled names, wrong dates are entered, students change names without telling the program). Also, agencies (e.g., DUA) with whom ACLS does data matching do not data match all that ACLS needs (e.g., National Student Clearinghouse does not data match certificate programs).

Q45. Who decided to change the denominator in the Equivalency Rate? Is this a federal decision or a state decision?

A. OCTAE decided to change the denominator in the equivalency rate. In Massachusetts’s state accountability system, ACLS will set the standard using the same denominator.

Q46. What does credential attainment rate with special rule mean?

A. The WIOA federal measure includes a special rule, and it is as follows (taken from the WIOA legislation): The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (subject to clause (iii)), during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program.

Q47. How do we measure effectiveness in serving employers? Who measures this?

A. There is currently a group of state-level stakeholders who are working to create a measure for this. More information will be provided as ACLS learns more and the work of this group is finalized.

Q48. If a student exits my program, goes to postsecondary education, but doesn't get a job by the second quarter after exit, will this hurt Massachusetts on a federal level? What about points on the state level?

A. The performance accountability system will consist of eight standards; these standards will carry their own total number of points. If a student does not have a job in the second or fourth quarter after exit, then the program would not receive past performance points on a state level for those two standards for that one student, and Massachusetts would not receive points on the federal level as well; however, it is likely that that student will make EFL gains, for which the program would receive points. Also, the program would receive points on the state level for the enrollment into postsecondary education. Massachusetts receives credit on the federal level for each Adult Secondary Education (ASE) level student who completes his/her high school equivalency only if that same student goes onto postsecondary education/training and/or was employed at some point during the first four quarters following the quarter in which they exit. Credit is always given on the federal level if the student goes into postsecondary education/training during that time period. Massachusetts does not receive credit for the federal level employment measures where students enter postsecondary/training but were not employed during the applicable reference time periods. However, there is no disincentive for postsecondary education enrollment.

Q49. Our community has a high percentage of families who do not qualify for TANF and SNAP but have high levels of need. Are they left out?

A. No. All students can make EFL gains, and all students can benefit from ABE services.

Q50. Please clarify the acceptable postsecondary education (PSE) enrollment.

A. PSE enrollment means enrollment in college (e.g., community colleges, including enrollment in ESE-funded Transition programs, and 4-year) and certificate programs. OCTAE will provide further guidance to states on this.

Q51. Programs will now be able to accept learners with a high school equivalency who test at GLE 10.9 or lower. Will ACLS consider increasing the SPL level for ESOL classes? SPL 6 is not enough to function adequately in postsecondary education or a job.

A. If the program deems that the student cannot adequately function in postsecondary education at SPL 7, then it is recommended that the program creates a bridge class/program to give the student further opportunity to improve his/her English skills; however, the student then would need an assessment other than an ESOL test (e.g., the MAPT, TABE 9/10 Writing).

Q52. Are we being rated on students' employment (which we have no impact on) and employment retention or promotion after they leave us?

A. Programs will be awarded performance points for students who have employment in the second and fourth quarters after a student's exit from the program. For points in these two standards (i.e., employment in the second quarter after exit; employment in the fourth quarter after exit) the student does not need to have the same job; the student just has to have been employed during each of those quarters in order for the program to receive points.

Q53. In terms of the new performance accountability system, how does a student that exits a program but continues as a Distance Learning (DL) student directly enrolled only count? They are continuing their education just not in class.

A. Currently, students who are directly enrolled (i.e., student attendance is captured only through the HUB) are excluded from the state performance standards. Students who are dually enrolled for more than 12 hours (i.e., attendance is captured at the CALC) are included in the performance standards. ACLS is working to define how DL students will be counted in the new performance accountability system.

Q54. If a student exits a program in order to go to attend postsecondary education full time, how will that impact the measures related to employment? Will programs be affected negatively if such students do not have employment at the 2nd or 4th quarter after exit?

A. ACLS will ensure that the state performance standards do not create a disincentive for students who are not employed during the second and fourth quarters after exit due to enrollment in postsecondary education and/or training.

Q55. Follow up rate is not an issue of performing the activity but rather that students move and contact information is no longer accurate. How will the rate account for this?

A. ACLS has decided not to include a performance standard on follow up.

Q56. Are there plans to include a second phone number in the student intake record? Previously there was a field for a second phone number. Sometime around FY 2012 – 2013 the alternate phone number was removed. Our experience with the SMARTT waitlist, which does have a second phone number, suggests that having a second phone number as part of the student intake record should increase our chances of successful contact during follow-up by survey.

A. ACLS is in the process of updating its intake form and will consider this change.

Q57. If I understand *Enter postsecondary education* cohort follow-up, the follow-up window for any given student could be anywhere from 6 months to 15 months, depending upon when they exited within the fiscal year. This assumes that we start following up in the first quarter following their exit. How frequently within that window will programs need to follow-up? For someone who exits in the first quarter – July to September – there are five quarters before the follow-up window closes for that cohort, on December 31 of the following fiscal year. For someone who exits in the last quarter – April to June – there are potentially two quarters within which to follow-up. In each case, how often will we be expected to contact the student? Can SMARTT do the filtering for us, so that students only appear on our list when it is appropriate to follow-up – neither too often nor not often enough?

A. Under WIOA, the reference periods are changing. ACLS is preparing guidance materials for programs.

Q58. This relates to General Question Q44: Doesn't data matching have to be improved? The answer mentions that one cause of unmatched data – data that would otherwise have been matched – is when a student changes his or her name, but doesn't tell the program. This is just a reminder that SMARTT does not allow editing of exited student names. We sometimes learn of a name change, but in the case of an exited student, there is no way for us to make that change in SMARTT.

A. Although the use of data matching helps identify many outcomes, not all outcomes are able to be captured through this method. Programs are responsible for following up with their students to find out if post-exit outcomes have been met in cases where alternative methods such as data matching fail to identify outcomes. ACLS is working to develop new follow up data entry screens in SMARTT that will allow programs to document outcomes for all exited students including those for which a potential later data match is possible. Previously, data entry was limited to the documentation by programs of those students who did not have the potential for data matching due to their not signing the release of information form and/or did not provide their social security number. Removal of that limitation will make it easier for programs to report outcomes.

Q59. If a student exits one ESE-funded site and enrolls in another ESE-funded site, is that really an exit as far as NRS Cohorts are concerned? In other words, is the first site responsible for following up, even though the student is current somewhere in the state? If the answer is no, will the follow-up screens in SMARTT exclude students that are current at some other site within the state? I believe that our program sees a disproportionate number of this sort of exit. We have multiple sites that are within 10 miles or less of each other. It is not uncommon for students to transfer from one site to another within the year, or to end one year at one site and start the next at another.

A. Yes, and yes. If a student exits a program and enrolls in another, then the first program is responsible for that student's outcomes (i.e., the student will show up on that program's follow-up report). ACLS is aware that site-level reporting is a challenge especially for multi-site programs, but at this time, SMARTT is unable to report at the project level.